

1-1-1971

# Sociological perspectives of mental retardation

Donna Cigno Joy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Joy, Donna Cigno, "Sociological perspectives of mental retardation" (1971). *Master's Theses, Capstones, and Projects*. 647.  
<https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd/647>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Stritch Shares. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses, Capstones, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Stritch Shares. For more information, please contact [smbagley@stritch.edu](mailto:smbagley@stritch.edu).

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES  
OF MENTAL RETARDATION

by

Donna Cigno Joy

Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Education  
(Education of Mentally Mandicapped)  
At the Cardinal Stritch College  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1971

This Research has been  
approved for the Graduate  
Committee of Cardinal  
Stritch College by

Sister Gabrielle Kowalski  
(Adviser)

Date March 5, 1971

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer would like to express her appreciation to the graduate faculty of Cardinal Stritch College for their assistance and insights in the field of special education. Without their knowledge and understanding of the field the writer could not have attempted this paper.

A special debt of gratitude is owed Sister Joanne Marie for her encouragement and insights not only in the writing of this paper, but also throughout the writer's graduate program at Cardinal Stritch College.

The writer would especially like to acknowledge the guidance, understanding, and aid of Sister Gabrielle whose help and understanding made this paper a reality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement .....	111
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Dynamics of Labeling in Retardation .....	3
III. Summary and Conclusion .....	22
Footnotes .....	24
Bibliography .....	28

# I

## INTRODUCTION

This paper represents an attempt to study selected aspects of the processes whereby certain individuals in contemporary public schools become singled out as deviant in intellectual ability and labeled as mildly retarded or educable mentally retarded. It is suggested that observations from the general literature in deviance have significant applications for a sociological perspective of mental retardation.

The focus in this paper is on what type of individuals in this society are likely to be labeled mentally retarded. This paper addresses itself to two major problems: 1) under what conditions are individuals likely to be designated as mentally deviant in intellectual ability, mentally retarded; 2) and what are the effects of such designation likely to be.

The concern here will be limited to those intellectually subnormal individuals who are characterized by statistical deviation from psychometric norms of intelligence and subnormal academic achievement, but with overall social competence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this paper does not address itself to those individuals who exhibit gross physical anomalies, or with those who deviate so greatly from the normal population that

their capacity for biological or economic survival is in jeopardy. Therefore, this paper will be limited to the discussion of the educable mentally retarded individual.

The cultural deprivation syndrome, and its implications for school performance, has received considerable attention in recent literature. With an orientation toward the social learning perspective of mental retardation, an attempt will be made to show that the bases for classifying some culturally deprived as retarded is in fact a social phenomenon and has to do with a particular value system and ideology. Attention will be drawn to the selection processes presumably involved in the school system in the creation and enforcement of the middle class norm; that is, in the labeling and segregating of the culturally deprived retarded. A further section of this paper will consider the conditions under which deviant (retarded) behavior is likely to stabilize. The stigma of the deviant label and its significance for the way the individual so stigmatized is perceived by others will be briefly indicated. Special attention will be given to how the individual's perception of himself, and the perception of his family of him, is likely to be effected. A concluding section will deal with a summary and conclusions which may be drawn from the research that has been reviewed.

## II

### THE DYNAMICS OF LABELING IN RETARDATION

Mental retardation has been viewed as pathological in terms of a medical model; however, a new perspective of mental retardation as a socio-cultural phenomenon of learning has recently been joined. This viewpoint is implicit in the many investigations of the effect of cultural deprivation on subsequent intellectual functioning.<sup>2</sup> Several variables in the cultural deprivation syndrome have been shown to be associated with poor academic achievement on the part of children reared in the typically culturally deprived home such as limited ability to use language effectively,<sup>3</sup> inadequate use of verbal mediation for cognitive control,<sup>4</sup> and lack of stimulation and opportunity.<sup>5</sup> These studies ascribe the learning disabilities confronting these children in schools as the consequence of social learnings in a culture that does not actively participate in the institutions which reflect the dominant culture in our society.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to understand that while the term "culturally deprived" is widely used, in actual fact no group exists which does not develop rules, norms or culture. There is adequate evidence to indicate that the so-called culturally deprived do have rules and norms by which behavior is regulated. Young children growing up in this particular setting are



socialized and inducted into rule-following behavior unique in that group with more or less success, in much the same way that children of middle class families are socialized into patterns of behavior that are appropriate, or are considered appropriate, in middle class families. The problem arises when the child who has been trained to follow one set of rules is transplanted into an environment, the school, that considers both the rule itself and the behavior that accompanies it as inappropriate, deviant, inferior, disruptive, or any other of the many ways middle class teachers describe the behavior of lower class children in the school situation.

It is true that a large number of the children who exhibit these inappropriate behaviors in school are in fact psychometrically deviant in intelligence as measured by current standardized tests of intelligence. But it is important to raise the question of whether it is in the best interests of the middle class orientated school system, or of the child himself, for this institution to label as retarded those individuals who find themselves inappropriately prepared for this new setting with its alien rules and required behaviors.

#### Bases of Classifications

It may be that it is quite appropriate for the schools to determine intellectual deviance. Festinger, in his "Theory of Social Comparison Processes," suggests that a group is likely to be differentiated on the basis of some ability that is relevant and important to it.<sup>7</sup> In the schools intellectual ability is of great relevance and importance, and consequently, according to Festinger, the school population is likely to be

sorted according to intellectual criteria. One could hypothesize that when the school is made particularly aware of intellectual performance, or when its level of intellectual capability is made suspect, it would tend to redefine and sharpen the boundaries of where normalcy in intelligence ends and where deviance begins. For example, "to locate its position in social space by defining its symbolic boundaries."<sup>8</sup>

Beatrice Wright has some suggestions as to why certain traits of individuals rather than others tend to be used by particular groups as the basis of differentiating the deviant from the non-deviant. She suggests that there are at least two aspects of a particular trait that help determine its importance and its likelihood of being regarded as a single attribute of an individual or being regarded as the essence of the person himself. One aspect, the self-connection gradient refers to the degree to which traits are seen as more or less related to the very being of the individual. For example, society does not usually categorize people on the basis of foot size; however, race, religion, and ethnic origin may be sufficient criteria for determining and labeling individuals as assets or liabilities to society. Wright also suggests that traits described by the verb "to be" are more closely connected to self than those described by the verb "to have;" thus, an individual is considered to be intelligent or to be retarded, but to have brown eyes or to have blue eyes. The second aspect, status value gradient refers to the degree that certain attributes are more highly prized in our society than are other attributes. Thus, ability to achieve (intel-)

ligence) has high status value in our culture, and hence persons lacking in this ability will be perceived as deficient in a part of the "self."<sup>9</sup>

Among the many critics of social institutions, L. A. Dexter is one of the few who questions whether moderate deviation in intelligence is of great enough importance and relevance to warrant special treatment and labeling of those who so deviate. Since, in most cases, no biological or physiological deviance has been discovered in the mildly retarded, much of the problem of mental retardation is a consequence of the socially prescribed role of the retarded. The status of the retardate appears to be more often an ascribed status than an achieved status.

Dexter suggests that the practice of classifying persons as mildly retarded is an outgrowth of the ideology of 1) the Protestant Ethic with its emphasis upon achievement as a justification of one's righteousness, and of 2) the French Revolutionary notion of equality with its concern not only for the opportunity to be equal, but the obligation to take advantage of the opportunity to be equal.<sup>10</sup> Dexter further contends that these twin ideologies led to compulsory education in America, and consequently a requirement for initiation into adult social status has become a demonstration of formal skill in coordinating meaning; for example, reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>11</sup> He postulates that some retardates become social problems only because of this requirement, not because of any inherent biological attribute. Thus, much of the cost and

trouble of retardates in our society is due to the socially prescribed role of the retardate, rather than to any actual deficit in intelligence.

Dexter warns that some individuals who test within the retarded range in their school years may not do so later on because of several important factors: delayed maturation, error in the intelligence tests, or simply because of the fact that intelligence tests are designed to predict ability to do well in school, rather than ability to get along socially or economically. Mild retardation may be tentative and its behavioral manifestations may be unique to the school situation, and hence caution should be exercised by those who have the power to label the mildly retarded as deviant.

It is important to note at this point that in most states of the United States the placement and labeling of individuals as mentally retarded is carefully legalized and regulated. It is also interesting to note that the norm-makers, state legislatures, and the norm-enforcers, local school officials and personnel, are predominantly of the middle classes. However, individuals to whom the norms are applied are disproportionately of the lower classes. Thus, it is a case of one group imposing its values and rules on another group, which may have entirely different values and rules. The fact that the middle class is able to sort out successfully mostly lower class individuals for special labeling, placement and treatment may be accounted for by the differences in power, both implicit and explicit, of the two groups.

### Stablization of Deviant Behavior

In recent literature great emphasis has been placed on the self-fulfilling prophecy and the mentally retarded. Thus, at some point the individual's behavior and intellectual functioning are considered by society as significantly below the norm, and he is then treated and labeled as mentally retarded. It is at this point that the individual assumes the role he is expected to play, that of a mentally retarded individual, and his behavior becomes stabilized.

It follows then, that the reactions of observers to the behavior of the retarded are of crucial significance in determining what future course his behavior will take. Societal reaction that presupposes the individual's essential normalcy should lead to a better prognosis of his behavior than societal reaction that considers the individual as deviant. Therefore, the designation of a child as retarded is likely to lead to more retarded behavior on his part, whereas confidence in a child's essential normalcy is likely to facilitate the appearance of normal behavior.

What constitutes mentally retarded behavior depends to a large extent upon the society which happens to be making judgment. An individual who does not create a problem for others in his social environment and who manages to become self-supporting is usually not defined as mentally retarded no matter what his test IQ may be. Mental retardation is primarily a socially defined phenomenon, and it is in large part meaningless to speak of mental retardation without this criterion in mind.<sup>12</sup>

Typically, individuals have been much more likely to be labeled as retarded during their school years than at the pre-school or post-school age levels; a finding that shows up

consistently in prevalence and survey studies.<sup>13</sup> This finding can be interpreted to indicate that mental retardation is most evident in academically oriented tasks. However, it is just as likely that the large number of labeled retardates in the school-age population indicate that schools are using inappropriate and irrelevant criteria in terms of total-life adjustment to classify individuals as retarded. The common rejoinder that the retarded are unable to meet standards of the school should perhaps raise more questions about the nature of the school than about the level of the individuals' intelligence.

It is true, that certain children are much more likely than others to exhibit behavior that is inappropriate in terms of academic achievement of the traditional sort. However, the fact appears to be that most individuals who score between approximately 50 and 70 or 80 on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale during their school years were not considered retarded in their pre-school years, and are not considered retarded after they complete their schooling. "The majority of these so-called mentally retarded children are able to meet most of life's changing expectation except those of the school as currently structured."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the child's intelligence becomes suspect usually upon entering the school situation. Once criteria for special class placement have been established the child is labeled, categorized, and stigmatized as mentally retarded until he leaves the school situation. Although the efficacy studies of

special class placement have shown the inadequacy of such programs, and different types of programs have been developed such as the Madison Plan, the resource room, and the team teaching approach the special education class remains. The school system has taken elaborate measures for the induction of certain children into the role of retardate, but no systematic, structural provisions are made by this system for the release from this role.<sup>15</sup>

This question of role release is one that deserves attention. The difficulty of shedding a deviant label such as ex-con or drug addict has been assumed or documented by many writers.<sup>16</sup> How is it that the special class graduate is generally able to lose his identity as retarded after his school years? While there is no direct evidence available to answer this question, several possibilities present themselves: 1) the individual is able to successfully conceal from employers the fact he is an "ex-special class retardate," he is able to pass; 2) the individual's family see the evaluation of the school as an irrelevant reference, and decline to take it seriously, thus, they refuse to see the individual as deviant.<sup>17</sup>

An almost 100 per cent recidivism rate (the children return to the special class year after year) may perhaps be explained by Dentler and Erikson's contention that "groups tend to induce, sustain, and permit deviant behavior."<sup>18</sup> Thomas Scheff, probing into the process whereby deviant behavior is sustained, postulates that: "Labeled deviants may be

rewarded for playing the stereotyped role,"<sup>19</sup> and that "labeled deviants are punished when they attempt the return to conventional roles."<sup>20</sup> Scheff's observations are made in the context of mental illness; it is obvious that research is needed to investigate the kind of behavior that is rewarded or punished in the special classes for the retarded.

Unacceptable behavior of the retarded in the special class is perpetuated by the class itself. Therefore, it would seem logical to place the retarded child with his normal peers in an attempt to provide an adequate model for him and to extinguish inappropriate behavior.<sup>21</sup>

#### Inter-Personal Perception

Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of the effects of classifying an individual as deviant in intellectual ability, some general comments on inter-personal perception are in order.

In his now classic studies, Asch, investigated the processes by which one person forms an impression of the personality of another. He reported that when presented with a variety of information about an individual such as a list of descriptive adjectives, his subjects tended to choose certain of the suggested traits and make them central aspects of the person's character, while other traits were relegated to a minor role or even ignored completely. The main finding was that people tend to organize their information about an individual into a coherent, consistent pattern.<sup>22</sup>

A similar notion is involved in what E. C. Hughes



called "master status" and "subordinate status." Hughes suggests that a certain trait of an individual tends to become a central, controlling trait and that other traits of the individual tend to be made complementary to it, or to become modified so they will not be incongruent with it.<sup>23</sup> Thus, a single deviant trait in an individual tends to assume master status and may have a generalized symbolic value so that people automatically assume that its bearer possesses other undesirable traits as well. "One receives the status as a result of breaking a rule, and the identification proves to be more important than most others. One will be identified as a deviant first, before other identifications are made."<sup>24</sup> The deviant identification becomes the controlling one, and the individual tends to be seen as generally rather than specifically deviant.

Following this line of thinking, then, one would hypothesize that a retarded individual is seen as first and foremost a retardate, and whatever other traits he may possess are modified to fit in with the stereotype of the retardate. That the label mentally deficient is in fact such a master trait and that it evokes accompanying subsidiary traits is evidenced in studies reported by Guskin in which subjects were asked to rate on an adjective list an imaginary individual about whom the only given information was that it was "an eighteen year old boy who has just returned home to live after being in a state training school for the feeble minded or mentally defective." The subjects considered this enough information to be able to rate the individual on such other traits as

"friendly" or "unfriendly," or "sloppy" or "neat."<sup>25</sup> The fact that stereotypes exist also for groups other than the retarded does not detract from the finding that the stimulus label mentally defective is potent enough to evoke complementary subsidiary traits.

In a recent study of social stereotype and mentally retarded children, Willey, found that normal fifth grade children held a more negative or unfavorable view of retarded pupils than they held of normal peers. Mentally retarded children were found generally to hold a positive concept of normal pupils in contrast to the predominantly negative view held of retardates by normal children.<sup>26</sup> This study indicates that even children of elementary school age form perceptual stereotypes as to what normal and retarded peers are like, not only in terms of academic adequacy, but extending to judgments of specific areas of social and personal competency. It seems reasonable to assume that such stereotypes are likely to influence interaction between the two groups of children.

However, rejection of the mentally retarded child by his normal peers cannot only be attributed to a social stereotype of the mentally retarded. In G. O. Johnson's well-known study of social acceptance of the mentally retarded child by his normal peers in grades one through five, the data revealed a comparatively larger number of rejected retarded children than of typical children who were actively rejected.<sup>27</sup> In a follow-up study by Johnson and Kirk a significant interaction between degree of acceptance and intelligence was found. Therefore, age of the mentally retarded and socioeconomic status

were not considered primary factors in rejection of the retarded child. It was concluded that isolation and rejection must be related to the lack of mentality.<sup>28</sup>

The results of Burton Blatt's study coincided with that of Johnson and Kirk's. The data indicated that IQ and mental age were positively correlated to social acceptance; chronological age was negatively related.<sup>29</sup> However, it seems reasonable to assume that stereotypes are likely to influence interaction between the mentally retarded and their normal peers to some degree.

J. S. Bruner has made some useful observation on the processes by which a controlling perception may be strengthened or modified. A fundamental proposition of his is that perceiving begins in an organism "tuned" to select certain features of his environment by an expectancy or hypothesis or set. Bruner suggests that the strengthening or weakening of an expectancy is related to 1) frequency of past confirmation; 2) monopoly or the number of alternative expectations held by a person concerning his environment. In the first instance, the parent who has viewed his child's pre-school developmental history as normal will be resistant to the information that his child is retarded. Likewise, teachers who see a long string of F's on a child's report card will be reluctant to revise their set even if the child begins to do fairly good work. In the second instance, when a sophisticated parent is presented with evidence from the school that his child has difficulty learning he might ascribe this to poor health of the child, an

inefficient teacher, the age of the child, or any number of alternatives. The more naive parent, having fewer alternative interpretations available to him, may be able to see his child only as "bright" or "dumb." 3) Supporting context refers to a particular expectation embedded in a larger system of supporting hypotheses and beliefs. For example, a child who is convinced of his intellectual inadequacy is likely to perform more poorly on tasks at which he could be quite competent. 4) Shared verification refers to a series of informants which suggest to a parent that his child is retarded. This information is more likely to be accepted than if only one informant expresses the judgment.<sup>30</sup>

#### Consequences of Labeling: The Family

Having noted some general considerations in interpersonal perception, more specific attention is directed to the ways in which a family's perception of one of its members may be altered upon receiving information that an individual is mentally retarded.

The impact of the retarded child on his family has led to a number of studies investigating such factors as family crises, redefinition of roles, kinds of definition of the handicapped child. However, the studies have been concerned primarily with the severely retarded child, who presents quite different problems from the mildly retarded in terms of identification, amount of care needed, prognosis for economic self-sufficiency and hence on disruptive effects on the family. Also, the problem of the severely retarded child is family

centered in the sense that he typically is unable to care for himself socially and economically, while the problem of the mildly retarded is typically school centered in the sense that his deviation has to do with lack of academic ability rather than lack of social or economic ability.

It is at the point where the child is defined as deviant that his impact as such begins in the family. When the family discovers that the child is retarded, it must redefine its perception of the child. The extent of the redefinition depends on the degree of retardation, socioeconomic status and the norms of the family. Clark and Farber indicate that higher status families tend to define the handicap as a lesser one, for example to say that the child has trouble reading instead of concluding that he is retarded. The norms and values of the family are of particular importance in the families of the culturally deprived because the norms of behavior of the family may be so diffuse or vague that the handicapped child's nonconformity under conventional conditions is not noticed.<sup>31</sup>

In a study conducted by Meyerowitz, it was noted that most parents of mildly retarded are not aware of any developmental deficiency in their child during his pre-school years.<sup>32</sup> This means that when parents were informed by the school that their child was retarded, the new information was not congruent with prior information they had about their child.

It is impossible in a paper of this nature to review all the literature on theories of attitude organization and change. Therefore, by way of illustration, selected aspects

of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance will be summarized here.

The point of interest in Festinger's theory will be centered on its implications for the way parents undergo an attitude change from believing that their child is normal to believing that the child is retarded. Many states require a parent's permission for a child to be placed in a special class for the retarded. The parent is thus asked to participate in an attitude-descrepant behavior, that is, consent to special placement in a class for the retarded for a child whom he may believe to be normal. Parents who consent to special class placement are in effect publicly committing themselves to the point of view that their child is retarded. Conversely, the more often the parent rejects the suggestion that his child is retarded, the more tenaciously one would expect him to cling to his interpretation that the child is normal. This would be the kind of situation that might exist where the child manifests ambiguous behavior and/or the teacher or neighbors or relatives suggest that the child might be retarded. The more often the parent denies the charge and explains away the behavior that is allegedly retarded, the more he will be affirmed in his original attitude.

The Meyerowitz study referred to earlier also indicates that many parents reject or ignore the communications of the school. For example, 55 per cent of the parents of children in special classes were judged unaware of the child's deviance at the end of one year of school, and more than one-fourth of

the parents of these children persisted in their belief that their child was "better than other children" in academic skills after two years in the special class. Also, no significant differences were found between the life-goals and occupational expectancy of the parents of the retarded group compared to a matched criterion group of normal intelligence. Meyerowitz interprets these data as suggesting that the parents of retarded children have accepted the middle class goal of occupational respectability but have rejected the school as the central means to this end. The school is seen as a non-significant reference for evaluation of the child. This places the child in the "vortex of conflicting assessments" and consequent maladaptive behavior may well ensue. Meyerowitz concurs with an earlier study by Olshansky and Schonfield in concluding that the parents' evaluation may well be valid within its context and that it is the school which perhaps should revise its evaluation of these children.<sup>33</sup>

#### Consequences of Labeling: The Retarded Child

One would expect the consequences of assignment to deviant status to have its most profound effect on the individual's perception of himself, that is, on his self-concept. It is at the point where societal labeling becomes self-labeling that the retarded individual becomes stabilized in his role as deviant.<sup>34</sup> "Treating a person as though he were generally rather than specifically deviant produces a self-fulfilling prophecy."<sup>35</sup> Thus, given special treatment and placement, the retarded individual begins to see himself as different.

The nature of changes in self-perception following special class commitment has been the focus of several investigations. That the nature of the problem is complex is evidenced by the lack of uniformity in the findings, although these discrepancies might be due to methodological differences.

In 1962 Meyerowitz reported that children who had been in a special class for the retarded for one year emitted more self-derogatory statements than a control group of retarded children in the regular grades.

A study by Mayer designed to measure differences in self-concept of retardates due to early or late special class placement, found no such differences.<sup>36</sup> This study reported that the self-concept of junior high retardates as measured by the Lipsett and the Piers and Harris scales was no different than that of the normal population on which the instruments had been standardized.

In a longitudinal study of self concept, Towne, Joiner and Schurr found evidence contrary to hypotheses engendered by Goffman's "On Cooling the Mark Out;"<sup>37</sup> mentally retarded children experienced no dip in self-concept over the first year in the special class.<sup>38</sup> In fact, he found a steady improvement in self-concept over the first year in the special class. One possible interpretation of this study is that the "mark" had all ready "cooled out" by the time of the first follow-up administration of the self-concept instrument.

The effect of special class placement on self-concept is an important issue, and deserves further careful study. Results of studies to date provide no clear cut answers to



the question.

Besides its effect on self-concept, what other changes occur in an individual subsequent to special class placement? While no longitudinal studies of the same individuals' performance before and after classification are available, it is well documented that children in special classes for the retarded perform more poorly, or at best, as well as, retarded peers left in the regular grades, in terms of academic achievement, and in some cases, personal and social adjustment.<sup>39</sup>

This statement should not be taken as an overall indictment of special classes. There is some evidence that specific kinds of children seem to make better progress within special classes. For example, Mullen and Itkin found that children with very low IQ's or with multiple handicaps, or coming from homes of low stability or family disintegration appeared to benefit more from special class placement than did similar children left in the regular grades.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Thurstone, in a post hoc analysis of data found that children with lower IQ's (50 to 59) made better gains in special classes.<sup>41</sup> With reference to personal and social adjustment, Cassidy and Stanton, Elenbogen, Kern and Pfaeffle, and Mullen and Itkin reported superiority of special class retardates over those attending the regular grades.<sup>42</sup> However, Ainsworth, Blatt and Johnson found no differences between the two groups.<sup>43</sup>

It is possible to speculate on the reasons for these generally unfavorable results obtained by retardates in special

classes. It is possible that a great deal of time in the special class is spent on non-academic activities, and hence the children achieve poorly. Special class teachers appear to be more interested in effecting social adjustment than academic achievement.<sup>44</sup> It is also possible that teachers of classes for the mildly retarded have a generalized low expectancy in terms of achievement for their students, and thus do not motivate or stimulate them adequately. This low expectancy may result from pessimism regarding mental retardation; many teachers may feel they have discovered the child's rate of potential, and never venture beyond this point. The importance of teacher expectancy has been dramatized by Rosenthal and Jacobson's study in which it was found that children randomly selected actually made significant gains in IQ when their teachers were told that these children had been identified as "late bloomers" and potentially bright.<sup>45</sup> Another possibility is that the lack of bright children in the special class has an inhibiting effect due to lack of competition; models of aspiration are not available against which the children can measure their performance as found in heterogeneous regular classes.

### III

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Research in the area of the educable mentally retarded indicates that a great majority of children are being penalized not because of intellectual deviance but rather because of cultural deviance. It is also true that children whose families subscribe to the middle class culture are equally penalized because they cannot achieve academically as prescribed by the norm. Thus, both groups of children are labeled mentally retarded and awarded an existing stereotype.

The child is no longer perceived as normal but as retarded. Society and its institutions react and respond to the individual as retarded; certain behavioral expectations and social characteristics are ascribed to the child. Thus, the child becomes retarded because he is treated as being retarded. Certain expectations, behaviorisms, and characteristics are further promoted by the isolation and segregation of the educable mentally retarded child from his normal peers by special class placement. Thus, society in its relationship with the child convinces the child he is retarded, therefore, he must act retarded. This is the self-fulfilling prophecy of the educable mentally retarded.

The information that is transmitted from the social institutions (school system) must alter to some extent the family's perception of the child. The extent of the redefinition of the child will depend upon the norms and values of the family and the existing information the family has regarding the child. Thus, the extent of the redefinition depends on the degree of retardation, socioeconomic status and the norms of the family. The norms and values of the family are of particular importance in the families of the "culturally deprived" because the norms of behavior of the family may be so diffused or vague that the child's nonconformity under conventional conditions is not noticed: Therefore, in the case of educable mentally retarded the family may view the school as a non-significant reference for the evaluation of the child.

It is suggested that a more comprehensive understanding of mental retardation can be facilitated by calling attention to certain sociological phenomena underlying the classification of the mildly retarded. The current propensity of the public schools for labeling and separating the mildly retarded is seen as an outgrowth of certain norms and ideologies, rather than accruing from any demonstrated advantages of such practices. It is further suggested that the assignment of an individual to deviant status has significant implications for the individual himself and for the way he will be perceived by others.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edgar A. Doll, "The Mentally Retarded," Exceptional Children, XXVII (June, 1961), 490.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd McCandless, "Environment and Intellectual Functioning," in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research, eds. by Rick Heber and H. A. Stevens (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 175-213.

<sup>3</sup> Basil Bernstein, "Social Class, Linguistic Codes and Grammatical Elements," Language and Speech, V (1962), 229.

<sup>4</sup> S. W. Gray and R. A. Klaus, "An Experimental Pre-school Program for Culturally Deprived," Child Development, XXXVI (December, 1965), 893.

<sup>5</sup> M. Deutsch, The Disadvantaged Child in the Learning Process: Some Social Psychological and Developmental Considerations, Paper prepared for the Ford Foundation's Conference on Curriculum and Teaching in Depressed Urban Areas, (New York: Columbia University, 1962), p. 34.  
(Mimeographed.)

<sup>6</sup> Benard Farber and Joseph H. Meyerowitz, "Family Background of Educable Mentally Retarded Children," Appendix B in Herbert Goldstein, Laura Jordan, and J. Moss, The Efficacy of Special Class Training on the Development of Mentally Retarded Children (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1965), p. 619.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," Human Relations, VII (June 1954), 117-140.

<sup>8</sup> R. A. Denter and K. T. Erikson, "The Functions of Deviance in Groups," Social Problems, VII (Fall, 1959), 162.

<sup>9</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, Physical Disability -- A Psychological Approach (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 112-115.

<sup>10</sup> L. A. Dexter, "On the Politics and Sociology of Stupidity in our Society," in The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance, ed. by M. S. Becker (New York: Free Press, 1964, p. 37-49.

- 11 L. A. Dexter, "A Social Theory of Mental Deficiency," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXII (March, 1958), 926.
- 12 B. A. Maher, "Intelligence and Brain Damage," in Handbook of Mental Deficiency, ed. by N. R. Ellis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 224-252.
- 13 E. M. Gruenberg, "Epidemiology," in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research, ed. by R. Meber and H. A. Stevens (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 259-306.
- 14 S. Olshansky, J. Schonfield, and L. Sternfeld, "Mentally Retarded or Culturally Different?," Training School Bulletin, LIX (1962), 20.
- 15 Herbert Goldstein, "Social and Occupational Adjustment," in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research, ed. by R. Heber and H. A. Stevens (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 214-258.
- 16 R. D. Schwartz and J. M. Skolnick, "Two Studies of Legal Stigma," in The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance, ed. by H. S. Becker (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 103-117.
- 17 Joseph H. Meyerowitz, "Parental Awareness of Retardation," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXXI (1967), 637-643.
- 18 R. A. Denter and K. T. Erikson, "The Functions of Deviance in Groups," Social Problems, VII (Fall, 1959), 335.
- 19 Thomas J. Scheff, Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), p. 84.
- 20 Ibid., p. 87.
- 21 Florence Christopolas and P. Renz, "A Critical Examination of Special Education Program," Journal of Special Education, III (Winter, 1969), 379.
- 22 S. E. Asch, "Forming Impressions of Personality," Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, XLI (July, 1946), 258-290.
- 23 Everette C. Hughes, "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status," American Journal of Sociology, L (March, 1945), 353-359.
- 24 H. S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 33.

- 25 S. Guskin, "Social Psychologies of Mental Deficiency," in Handbook of Mental Deficiency, ed. by N. R. Ellis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 325-352.
- 26 N. R. Willey, "A Study of Social Stereotype and Mentally Retarded Children" (unpublished doctoral disseration, Indiana University, 1966), p. 68.
- 27 G. Orville Johnson, "A Study of Social Positions of Mental Handicapped Children in Regular Grades," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LV (July, 1950), 60-89.
- 28 G. Orville Johnson and S. A. Kirk, "Are Mentally Handicapped Children Segregated in the Regular Grades?," Exceptional Children, XVII (December, 1950), 65-68
- 29 Barton Blatt, "The Physical, Personality and Academic Status of Children who are Mentally Retarded Attending Special Classes as Compared with Children who are Attending Regular Classes," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LVII (March, 1958), 810-818.
- 30 J. S. Bruner, "Personality Dynamics and the Process of Perceiving," in Perception --An Approach to Personality, ed. by R. P. Blacke and G. V. Ramsey (New York: Ronald Press, 1951), p. 135.
- 31 S. M. Clark and Benard Farber, The Handicapped Child in the Family: A Summary of Literature Pertaining to Research on Families with Handicapped Individuals, Report for the Conference on the Cerebal-Polsied Individual in the Family, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962).  
(Mimeographed.)
- 32 Meyerowitz, "Parental Awareness of Retardation," 637-643.
- 33 S. Olshansky and J. Schonfield, "Parental Perceptions of the Mental Status of Graduates of Special Classes," Mental Retardation, III (1965), 16-20.
- 34 Scheff, Being Mentally Ill, p. 88.
- 35 Becker, Outsiders, p. 34.
- 36 C. L. Mayer, "The Relationship of Early Special Class Placement and the Self-Concepts of Mentally Handicapped Children," Exceptional Children, XXXIII (October, 1966), 77-81.

37 E. Goffman, "On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure," Psychiatry, XV (November, 1952), 462.

38 L. M. Joiner, T. Schurr, and R. D. Towne, The Effects of Special Classes on the Self-Concept of Academic Ability of the Educable Mentally Retarded: A Time Series Experiment, Paper presented at the 45th Annual International CEC Convention, (St. Louis, 1967),

39 M. L. Elenbogen, "A Comparative Study of Some Aspects of Academic and Social Adjustment of Two Groups of Mentally Retarded Children in Special Classes and in Regular Grades," Dissertation Abstracts, XVII (1957), 2497.

40 W. Itkin and F. A. Mullen, Achievement and Adjustment of Educable Mentally Handicapped Children, U. S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project SAE6529 (Chicago: Board of Education, 1961).

41 T. G. Thurstone, An Evaluation of Educating Mentally Handicapped Children in Special Classes and in Regular Grades, U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project OE SAE6452 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1959).

42 Itkin and Mullen, Achievement and Adjustment, p. 89.

43 Blatt, "Status of Children who are Mentally Retarded," p. 815.

44 V. M. Cassidy and J. E. Stanton, An Investigation of Factors involved in the Educational Placement of Mentally Retarded Children: A Study of Differences Between Children in Special and Regular Classes in Ohio, U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project No. 043 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1959).

45 L. Jacobson and Robert Rosenthol, "Teachers' Expectancies: Determinants of Pupils' IQ Gains," Psychological Reports, IXX (August, 1966), 115-118.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Becker, M. S. Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.
- Festinger, Leon. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Goldstein, Herbert, Moss, J. and Jordan, Laura. Efficacy of Special Class Training on the Development of Mentally Retarded Children. Urbana; Illinois: University of Illinois, 1965.
- Goffman, E. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.
- Goffman, E. Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.
- Hunt, J. McV. Intelligence and Experience. New York: Ronald Press, 1961.
- Johnson, G. Orville. A Comparative Study of the Personal and Social Adjustments of Mentally Handicapped Children Placed in Special Classes with Mentally Handicapped Children who Remain in Regular Classes. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University, 1961.
- Kirk, Samuel A. Early Education of the Mentally Retarded. Urban, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1958.
- Maher, B. A. "Intelligence and Brain Damage." Handbook of Mental Deficiency. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.
- Masland, R. L., Sarason, S. B., and Gladwin, T. Mental Subnormality. New York: Basic Books, 1958.
- Riessman, F. The Culturally Deprived Child. New York: Harper 1962.
- Robinson, Malbert, and Robinson, Nancy M. The Mentally Retarded Child. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

Rothstein, Jerome H. Mental Retardation and Resources.  
New York: Molt, Rinehard, and Winston, 1961.

Sarason, Seymour B., and Doris, John. Psychological Problems in Mental Deficiency. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Scheff, Thomas J. Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory.  
Chicago: Aldine, 1966.

Wright, Beatrice A. Physical Disability -- A Psychological Approach. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

#### Articles and Journals

Asch, S. E. "Forming Impressions of Personality." Journal of Abnormal Psychology, XLI (July, 1946), 258-290.

Benda, C. E., Squires, N. I., Ogonik, J., and Wise, R. "Personality Factors in Mild Retardation." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, XLVIII (January, 1963), 24-40.

Bernstein, B. "Social Class, Linguistic Codes and Gramatical Elements." Language and Speech, V (1962), 221-240.

Blatt, Burton. "The Physical, Personality and Academic Status of Children who are Mentally Retarded Attending Special Classes as Compared with Children who are Attending Regular Classes." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXII (March, 1958), 810-818.

Bruner, J. S. "Personality Dynamics and the Process of Perceiving." (eds.) R. P. Blacke and G. V. Ramsey in Perception -- An Approach to Personality. New York: Ronald Press, 1951.

Christopolos, Florence, and Renz, Paul. "A Critical Examination of Special Education Programs." Journal of Special Education, III (Winter, 1969), 371-387.

Cohen, A. K. and Short, J. F. "Juvenile Delinquency." (eds.) R. K. Merton and R. A. Nisbet in Contemporary Social Problems. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961.

Dentler, R. A. and Erikson, K. T. "The Functions of Deviance in Groups." Social Problems, IIV (Fall, 1959).

Dexter, L. A. "A Social Theory of Mental Deficiency." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXII (March, 1958), 920-928.

- Dexter, L. A. "On the Politics and Sociology of Stupidity in Our Society." (ed.) M. S. Becker in The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance. New York: Free Press, 1964.
- Doll, Edgar A. "The Essentials of an Inclusive Concept of Mental Deficiency." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, XLVI (September, 1946), 214-219.
- Doll, Edgar A. "The Mentally Retarded." Exceptional Children, XXVII (June, 1961), 487-493.
- Dunn, Lloyd. "Special Education for the Mildly Retarded -- Is Much of It Justifiable." Exceptional Children, XXXV (September, 1968), 5-22.
- Elenbogen, M. L. "A Comparative Study of Some Social Adjustment of Two Groups of Mentally Retarded Children in Special Classes and in Regular Grades." Dissertation Abstracts, XVII (1957), 2497.
- Festinger, Leon. "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." Human Relations, VII (June, 1954), 117-140.
- Gardner, William I. "Social and Emotional Adjustment of Mildly Retarded Children and Adolescents." Exceptional Children, XXXIII (October, 1966), 97-105.
- Goffman, E. "On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaption to Failure." Psychiatry, XV (November, 1952), 451-463.
- Goldstein, Herbert. "Social and Occupational Adjustment." (eds.) Rick Heber and M. A. Stevens in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Gray, S. W. and Klaus, R. A. "An Experimental Preschool Program for Culturally Deprived Children." Child Development, XXXVI (December, 1965), 887-898.
- Gruenberg, E. M. "Epidemiology." (eds.) Rick Herber and H. A. Stevens in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Guskin, S. "Social Psychologies of Mental Deficiency." (ed) N. R. Ellis in Handbook of Mental Deficiency. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.
- Hess, R. D. and Shipman, V. "Early Experience and Socialization of Cognitive Models in Children." Child Development, XXXVI (December, 1965), 869-886.

- Hughes, Everette C. "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status." American Journal of Sociology, L (March, 1945), 353-359.
- Jensen, R. A. "Cumulative Deficit in Compensatory Education." Journal of School Psychology, IV (1966), 137-147.
- Johnson, G. Orville. "A Study of Social Positions of Mentally Handicapped Children in Regular Grades." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LV (July, 1950), 60-89.
- Johnson, G. Orville and Kirk, Samuel A. "Are Mentally Handicapped Children Segregated in the Regular Grades?" Exceptional Children, XVII (December, 1950), 65-68.
- Kern, W. H. and Pfaeffle, H. A. "A Comparison of Social Adjustment of Mentally Retarded Children in Various Educational Settings." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXVII (November, 1962), 407-413.
- Kirk, Samuel A. "Research in Education." (eds.) Rick Heber and H. A. Stevens in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Lemert, E. M. "Social Structure, Social Control and Deviation." (ed.) M. B. Clinard in Anomic and Deviant Behavior. New York: Free Press, 1964.
- Mayer, C. L. "The Relationship of Early Special Class Placement and the Self-Concept of Mentally Handicapped Children." Exceptional Children, XXXIII (October, 1966), 77-81.
- McCandless, Boyd. "Environment and Intellectual Functionings." (eds.) Rick Heber and H. A. Stevens in Mental Retardation: A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Meyerowitz, Joseph H. "Self-Derogation in Young Retardates." Child Development, XXXIII (June, 1962), 443-451.
- Meyerowitz, Joseph H. "Parental Awareness of Retardation." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXXI (1967), 637-643.
- Olshansky, S. and Schonfield, J. "Parental Perception of Mental Status of Graduates of Special Classes." Mental Retardation, III (1965), 16-20.
- Olshansky, S., Schonfield, J. and Sternfeld, L. "Mentally Retarded or Culturally Different?" Training School Bulletin, LIX (1962), 18-21.
- Rosenthal, Robert and Jacobson, L. "Teachers' Expectancies: of Pupils' IQ Gains." Psychological Reports, XIX (August, 1966), 115-118.

- Sowartz, R. D. and Skolnick, J. H. "Two Studies of Legal Stigma." (ed.) H. S. Becker in The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance. New York: Free Press, 1964.
- Solomons, G., Cushna, B., Opitz, E. and Grace, M. A. "An Investigation of Social Status Differences Among Educable and Trainable Children." American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LXXI (1966), 207-212.
- Spicker, H. H., Hodges, W. L., and McCandless, Boyd R. "A Diagnostically Based Curriculum for Mentally Retarded Children." Exceptional Children, XXXIII (December, 1966), 215-220.

#### Government Publications

- Ainsworth, L. H. An Exploratory Study of Educational, Social and Emotional Factors in the Education of Mentally Retarded Children in Georgia Public Schools. U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project No. 171. Athens; Georgia: University of Georgia, 1959.
- Cassidy, V. M. and Stanton, J. E. An Investigation of Factors Involved in the Educational Placement of Mentally Retarded Children: A Study of Differences Between Children in Special and Regular Classes in Ohio. U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project No. 043. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1959.
- Mullen, F. A. and Itkin, W. Achievement and Adjustment of Educable Mentally Handicapped Children. U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project SAE 6529. Chicago: Board of Education, 1961.
- Thurstone, T. G. An Evaluation of Educating Mentally Handicapped Children in Special Classes and in Regular Grades. U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Program, Project OE SAE 6452. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1959.

#### Unpublished Papers

- Clark, S. M. and Farber, Benard. The Handicapped Child in the Family: A Summary of Literature Pertaining to Research on Families with Handicapped Individuals. Prepared for the Conference on "The Cerebral-Palsied Individual in the Family." Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962. (Mimeographed.)

- Deutsch, M. The Disadvantaged Child in the Learning Process: Some Social Psychological and Developmental Considerations. Paper prepared for the Ford Foundation Work Conference on Curriculum and Teaching in Depressed Urban Areas. New York: Columbia University, 1962. (Mimeographed.)
- Towne, R. D., Joiner, L. M. and Schurr, T. The Effects of Special Classes on the Self-Concept of Academic Ability of the Educable Mentally Retarded: A Time Series Experiment. Paper read at the 45th Annual International CEC Convention, St. Louis, 1967.
- Willey, N. R. A Study of Social Stereotype and Mentally Retarded Children. Unpublished Doctoral Disseration. Indiana University, 1966.